What does a CRANBERRY have in common with the Astoria Country Club?

IT ALL STARTED AS A CRANBERRY FARM

Written by Peter Weiss

A new holiday riddle for you all: What goes great with a Thanksgiving turkey dinner but even better with golf? The answer is, of course, the cranberry. One of the interesting facts about the founding of Astoria Golf & Country Club in 1923 is the most northerly 40 acres of the property, comprising approximately the 8th hole, substantial portions of the 7th and 9th holes, and the practice area, was acquired by the club from the Glenwood Cranberry Company. Our club is still in possession of the original property deed from the company dated July 31st, 1923. Interestingly, Astoria Golf & Country Club is far from unique in having a golf course built on a cranberry farm.

Cranberry farming on the Oregon Coast has been good business for a long time. Bandon, on Oregon's southern coast, in addition to now being the golf capital of Oregon thanks to the Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, is also known as "The Cranberry Capital of Oregon." Bandon, Oregon produces about 5% of all the cranberries grown in the United States, according to The Bandon Guide. Apparently, portions of the Pacific Dunes golf course at the resort were once part of a cranberry farm, according to a caddie friend of mine who is knowledgeable about golf trivia.

Another top-rated course, Cape Cod National Golf Club in Brewster, Massachusetts, was also built on a former cranberry farm. In fact, Massachusetts is the second largest cranberry producing state, and boasts multiple courses that were built around or over former cranberry farms. Perhaps the most dramatic of these is Southers Marsh Golf Club in Plymouth, MA, which plays through and around a series of bogs on a working cranberry farm. It is owned by a family who have been farming cranberries on that land for over 100 years.

The cranberry is the fruit of any one of several shrubs of the genus Vaccinium. The variant most known to us is Vaccinium macrocarpon, the American cranberry, which is farmed extensively in the United States, particularly in the states of Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Oregon. These plants are grown in moist environments, or "bogs," which are flooded part of the year near harvest time. A close relative, Vaccinium oxycoccos, is native to Northern Europe, especially bogland environments in Scotland and Northern England. In fact, the European cranberry once grew wild

in a variety of areas on the northwest coast of Great Britain which now contain multiple famous golf courses. Several areas around the area of the Solway Firth in England and Scotland are protected bogland habitats in which the cranberry flourishes. Two outstanding golf 8 courses, Silloth-on-Solway Golf Club and Southerness Golf Club, also happen to be there. Silloth-on-Solway would probably get my vote as being the most underrated golf course on the planet; if you are able to get to that rather isolated corner of England, play it. I guarantee that you won't be disappointed.

So why is it that cranberry bogs and cranberry farms seem to be one of the favored habitats used for conversion to golf courses? In my research for this article, I couldn't find a lot of information, but I do have a few thoughts on the subject. First, the cranberry tends to be native to seaside locations, such as the Solway Firth in England and Scotland, and Cape Cod in Massachusetts. While cranberries are commercially grown in other areas (Wisconsin being the notable example) most commercial cranberry farms or "bogs" are still located by the sea. Bandon, Oregon, and Cape Cod are the two notable examples. That golf courses would be built on or around old cranberry bogs makes a kind of intuitive sense. Golf originated as a seaside game. The land adjoining the sea is typically not fertile enough for commercial agriculture or other activities because it is too sandy (however more on that below) but generally perfect for golf because it tends to have fairly firm ground. The sandy soil also drains extremely well in comparison to clay-based or other soils, a necessity for golf courses. In addition, seaside land has enough unusual formations and elevation changes, such as sand dunes, to make a golf game interesting. However, it also has areas flat enough to lay out fairways and greens without doing a lot of earth moving.

Most important, however, is that the cranberry seems to thrive in sand-based soil. Contrary to what seems to be a popular belief, the cranberry is not an aquatic plant; while it is grown in a bog environment that is flooded at harvest time to enhance ripening characteristics, it is a soil-based shrub. The cranberry plant seems to grow best in the sandy soil that is typically found in seaside environments. That is, of course, the type of land that seems to make some of the best golf courses. Since the soil characteristics of cranberry bogs seem ideal for golf, it is not surprising that there seem to be several great courses built on former cranberry bogs. I'm sure during further research I'll be able to find even more than those listed above. So, the next time you tee it up on Number 8 at Astoria Golf & Country Club, remember, it all started as a cranberry farm.